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Shadow images moving to music: *La Tentation de saint Antoine* in Montmartre

Peter Dayan, Edinburgh and Aalborg

This essay concerns three works all entitled *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, dating from the period 1874-1888. Two of them are books; the third was a performance in the shadow theatre of the Chat Noir cabaret in Montmartre, Paris. All three create strange, original, and thought-provoking relationships (real or imagined) between performance, music, and the moving image; and they similarly relate to each other in remarkable ways with profound implications for our understanding of intermedial connections in art, both at the time and more generally. I shall begin with the last of the three to be produced, which is also the least famous, the least studied, and the most unique and extraordinary in its format.

*La Tentation de saint Antoine*¹ by Henri Rivière is a book published in Paris in 1888. It appears at first sight to belong to the category of the “livre d’artiste”, which had been invented not long before, precisely in Paris: the illustrations and the physical quality of the book as an art object are clearly essential production values. It is indeed a strikingly beautiful thing. Images of it can be found by googling on:

“tentation de saint Antoine” Henri Rivière

The cover of the book gives no explicit clue to its genre. On the title page, however, we read:

Féerie à grand spectacle
en 2 actes et 40 tableaux
par
HENRI RIVIÈRE
représentée pour la première fois sur le théâtre du *Chat Noir*
Le 28 décembre 1887
musique nouvelle et arrangée de
MM ALBERT TINCHANT et GEORGES FRAGEROLLE
(Rivière 1888: 1)

The “féerie” was a primarily theatrical, rather than literary, genre, unique, really, to 19th-century France, with no exact equivalents elsewhere or at other periods. Its principal ingredients were its spectacular stage-craft, with ingenious scene changes and startling special effects, often involving magical apparitions; its melodramatic and morally simplistic plot, always including magic, supernatural beings, a struggle between good and evil, and the victory of the former; and song and dance. It was universally perceived as a triumph of spectacle over plot, of the visual, musical, and choreographical over the verbal. Whereas other kinds of plays were routinely published and read as literary works in their own right, this made little sense for the “féerie”; generally speaking, when “féeries” were published, they were received, so to speak, as “books of the play”, to remind those who had seen and loved the stage versions of the spectacle they had experienced. (One startling exception to this rule is *Le Château des cœurs* by Gustave Flaubert, which was published as a text, explicitly designated as a “féerie”, and never performed. It is, of all the works he published, the least known. We will shortly come to another, more famous, text by Flaubert which seems, like *Le Château des cœurs*, to quote Mallarmé, “non possible au théâtre, mais exigeant le théâtre” (“not possible in the theatre, but requiring the theatre”) (Mallarmé 1995: 242).) Rivière’s book, in referencing the theatre

¹ The punctuation of the title is given in three different forms in Rivière’s book: with and without the hyphen, with and without the capital on “saint”. I use the form popularized by Flaubert.

at which the “féerie” was performed, seems at first glance to conform to this tradition. Yet, when one goes beyond the title page, what one finds is certainly not a traditional “book of the play” – any more than it is a traditional “livre d’artiste”.

To begin with: the words that the characters would speak in a “féerie”, which would transmit the plot and define the characters, are almost completely absent. There are, in fact, no words attributed to any protagonist, until page 34 of the book, which has a total of 88 pages. Indeed, there are few words of any kind. Each double page spread, in the book, consists of two elements. The right hand page is entirely taken up by a wordless and untitled illustration, often richly coloured. The left hand page gives a title which is plainly that of one of the forty “tableaux” that compose the work; then, below that title, a piece of music, either taken from a pre-existing source (as was common practice in a “féerie”), or written in a recognisable popular style. This lay-out is, to my knowledge, unique in the history of the “livre d’artiste”, certainly in that century. The norm, as established by Mallarmé and Manet a decade earlier, was to present poetry and visual art together, but to leave music as an art merely suggested. Rivière, on the contrary, presents music and visual art, and leaves the poetry to the imagination.

The story the book tells is, then, not made verbally explicit. But the illustrations show clearly enough what is going on; and in any case, it is a safe bet that the book’s intended market was people who had either seen the shadow play, or knew Flaubert’s *Tentation de saint Antoine*, published fourteen years earlier, and unambiguously the inspiration behind Rivière’s work. Saint Antoine, presented as the dark figure of a tormented ascetic, dressed in rags, is being subjected to a series of temptations, designed to lead him astray from his Christian faith. He resists, despite great suffering. These temptations begin in the City of Light, contemporary Paris, with its bewildering array of appeals to greed, from gourmandise to high-society gambling. Then, clearly orchestrated by the Devil (a dark figure, like the saint), comes the temptation of science. After that, the saint is subjected to the temptation of sensuality, embodied by the Queen of Sheba, and by a troop of pretty ballerinas (whom we had already seen on the front cover). Finally, the saint is made to witness a procession of divinities from other religions, who try to persuade him of their superior attractions. He never ceases to resist, of course, despite his agonies, and is rewarded, in true “féerie” style, by a spectacular final apotheosis, when he ascends, surrounded by angels, to a traditional Christian heaven. Apart from the scenes of contemporary Paris, the ballerinas, and the final apotheosis, the themes of these tableaux are taken more or less directly from Flaubert’s book.

Most of the illustrations which occupy the right-hand pages depict both a temptation, and the agonised saint, whose difficulty in resisting is always obvious. The temptation is often colourful and attractive; the saint is, in contrast, dark, small, and tormented. We have been informed on the title page that the “féerie à grand spectacle”, first performed at the theatre of the Chat Noir on 28 December 1887, consisted of 40 tableaux. The book has 40 double pages illustrating temptations. The reader therefore assumes that each double page corresponds to a tableau in the performance; and equally, doubtless, that the music which occupies the left hand page, opposite each illustration, represents what was played during the tableau in question.

How does that music relate to the images? The answer appears surprisingly simple. Most of it consists of tunes from well-known operas or other theatrical works of the time. Some of it was composed by Albert Tinchant and Georges Fragerolle, as the title page had informed us; but that, too, is quite conventional in style. And in every case, there is an obvious musical meaning. The music clearly illustrates one aspect of what is happening in the scene pictured on the facing page – but only one aspect. It always represents the temptation. More particularly, it represents what is attractive, tempting, in the temptation. It never represents the torment and anguish of the saint as he resists. Often, as when he is tempted by the food in “Les Halles”, the great Parisian market, or by the pretty ballerinas, the tune is a light-hearted one taken from a contemporary ballet or comic opera, by composers such as Lecocq or Delibes. Wagner is conscripted to provide the Ride of the Valkyries when the Norse gods appear; Offenbach’s comic version of the Orpheus legend provides jaunty tunes to introduce the Greek muses and the gods of Olympus. There is a striking contrast between this stereotypically Parisian lightness, and the torment and resistance of the saint, which is, after all, the thread that holds the narrative together; as if the music were on the side of the City of Light which provides the first series of temptations, rather than of the eponymous hero. One might ask why. Indeed, that question, of which side the music is on, turns out, as we shall see, to hold the key to

understanding the extraordinary success of Rivière's *Tentation*. But before returning to that question, let us ask where words come in, relative to both music and images.

The only text spoken by a character in Rivière's book also provides the first explicit reference to the book by Flaubert which was clearly the inspiration for Rivière's work. It comes approximately in the middle of the series of temptations, on a left-hand page, just above a line of music which, unusually, is not immediately identified. Here is the text in its entirety:

ANTOINE.

Ah! plus haut! plus haut! toujours!

... Les astres se multiplient, scintillent. La Voie lactée au zénith se développe comme une immense ceinture, ayant des trous par intervalles[,] dans ces fentes de sa clarté, s'allongent des espaces de ténèbres. Il y a des pluies d'étoiles, des traînées de poussière d'or, des vapeurs lumineuses qui flottent et se dissolvent.

Quelquefois une comète passe tout à coup; – puis la tranquillité des lumières innombrables recommence.....

(Gustave Flaubert, *La Tentation de saint Antoine*
(Rivière 1888 : 34)²

Ah! higher! higher! always higher!

... The stars multiply, sparkle. At the zenith, the Milky Way unfolds as an immense belt, with holes at intervals; in these gaps in its clarity, spaces of darkness stretch out. There are showers of stars, trails of gold dust, luminous vapours which float and dissolve.

Sometimes, suddenly, a comet passes; - then the tranquillity of the innumerable lights returns.

(Gustave Flaubert, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*

This text introduces a series, unique in the book, of three tableaux, three double-page spreads, all with the same title: "Le Ciel" ("The Heavens"). On each of the three left-hand pages is a single line of music, a tune which continues across all three. This tune is eventually identified, at the end of the third left-hand page, as 'Rêverie', by Schumann. It is, indeed, a simplified version of the famous tune from Schumann's 'Träumerei', from his *Kinderszenen*, opus 15. The dreaminess which it incarnates is certainly compatible with the otherworldly beauty of the heavens, as it is expressed in the quotation from Flaubert and materialised in the extraordinary illustrations, which represent planets (including, recognisably, the Earth), stars, and the Milky Way seen from space. But what is their relationship with the two dark figures that, in those illustrations, drift across those heavens? One, a black winged monster with hooves and tail, is the Devil; the other is the saint, dragged by the Devil and looking anguished, as usual. Neither Schumann's "Rêverie", nor Flaubert's words, seem to take any account of this strange couple.

ILLUSTRATION (PAGES 34 AND 35)

Caption: Rivière 1888: 34-5

The mystery deepens if one compares these three tableaux in Rivière's book with the scene from Flaubert's *Tentation de saint Antoine* which obviously inspired them. As Flaubert's Devil takes the saint up into the heavens, the first thing to which the saint responds is the beauty of the universe, as shown in the quotation given by Rivière. But then he becomes increasingly distressed by the fact that the three-dimensional universe which the Devil shows him leaves no distinctive place for God's Heaven, no direction in which to seek Him. Antoine had always thought of Heaven as being above him; but in space, as the Devil says, there is no up and no down, only equivalent and ultimately homogenous space, in all directions. Where, then, is God? According to the Devil, He is at once

² The closing bracket after "Antoine" is missing in the original. All translations in this essay are mine.

everywhere and nowhere; he is not beyond the material universe, but rather coterminous with it, and Antoine's desire to believe in Him as a loving presence, a father, a great soul, above and beyond the visible world, is foolish nonsense. As the Devil advances this argument, Antoine's suffering steadily intensifies, to the point where he feels he is losing his consciousness of his own being, as the undifferentiated nature of the universe absorbs and destroys him. This suffering is plainly visible in Rivière's startling illustrations, which show the Devil carrying Antoine, like an eagle might carry its prey, steadily further from his home on Earth, and out towards the edges of the solar system. The illustration I give here shows the first of the three images in this series, with Antoine and the Devil quite large, near the centre of the page and also near a clearly recognisable planet Earth. In the two subsequent images, Antoine becomes a diminishing black figure, moving as he shrinks, pulled by the Devil towards the edge of a magnificent colourful cosmos from whose meaning he is excluded. His suffering clearly increases as his stature and centrality diminish. But that suffering, that existential distress, expressed both in Flaubert's book and in Rivière's illustrations, is totally absent both from the music and from the words present in Rivière's book.

The music, then, appears to be saying something different from, or at least more limited than, what the pictures say. Perhaps one might be tempted to align the meaning of the music with the meaning of the words from Flaubert's *Tentation* that Rivière quotes; in those words, which are taken from near the beginning of Flaubert's scene, Antoine is still at the stage of being dazzled by the beauty of the cosmos. But anyone who knows Flaubert's text – and surely most of the readers of Rivière's book at the time would have known it – will be acutely aware of what happens in the latter part of that scene, of the way the Devil torments the saint. Thus Flaubert's words, though so few of them are there, seem to echo hauntingly the medial divide between right-hand and left-hand pages: the present words seem to agree with the music, but only absent words fully agree with the illustrations. There is a peculiar tangle of fault-lines between the apparent meanings of the music, of the visible text, of the occluded text, and of the illustrations. Why? That is the question at the heart of this essay. But before we can answer it, we have to take account of a second phantomatic presence behind this work. Just as Flaubert's book is evoked and cited in a way that encourages us to seek parallels with Rivière's book, parallels whose vanishing point appears to be in puzzlement as much as in enlightenment, so the "féerie" in the Chat Noir cabaret is cited and evoked; and readers in 1888, unlike readers in the 21st century, would have been aware of that performance, as much as of Flaubert's book. What kind of intertext does it provide?

The title page of Rivière's book, as we have seen, says that the "féerie" had been performed in the theatre of the Chat Noir. What it does not specify, but what everyone at the time would have been aware of, was the diminutive size of the proscenium of the theatre in question. It was not much larger than a modern domestic flat-screen television. It measured about 1.40 metres by 1.12. It was a piece of canvas inserted into the back wall of a second-floor room in the cabaret's building in Montmartre.

The Chat Noir cabaret itself was a unique space in many ways. I doubt that any other four walls in the world have ever had between them, in the space of a dozen years, so many great and famous artists, including, for example, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Erik Satie, Claude Debussy, Tchaikovsky, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Monet, Renoir, and Rodin, not to mention the Prince of Wales, Clémenceau, Garibaldi, and several characters from Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. This popularity and wide appeal among the social and artistic élite was not coincidental. The truly unique thing about the Chat Noir was the way it brought together the most absolute unshakeable belief in the high art tradition, the great Romantic belief in art and beauty with its concomitant hatred of philistines and rationalists and materialists, with a truly tremendous sense of irony and sarcasm based on the firm principle that there is a totally unbridgeable gap between the realm of true beauty, and the world we live in. But the world we live in nonetheless (and this is central to the Chat Noir aesthetic) provides the only possible material for art; so that at the heart of the Chat Noir experience is a vertiginous sense of comic distance between what we are currently doing, thinking, desiring, and working with in this world, and what really matters. Anyone who does not have that sense of comic distance, from the Chat Noir point of view, had to be either a bourgeois philistine or else a ridiculous idealistic idiot. The Chat Noir thus created a powerful ideological position which invited those who shared it mercilessly to mock outsiders. Those outsiders included, generally, capitalists and rationalists on the one hand, and believers in established religion on the

other. That mockery of both the seriousness of rationalism, and the seriousness of religion, combined with an intense idealism, played beautifully into the French tradition of wit and lightness, as well as into the increasingly forceful idealism of the times; and the pleasures of belonging to a group that could see itself as a very French élite, superior by its wit, and able to laugh at the leaden-footed bourgeoisie, were clearly highly attractive to many of the leading minds of the time.

The cabaret and its house journal, also called *Le Chat Noir*, had a very long list of eminent contributors, but a much shorter list of people who really moulded its character. On that short list figures the now forgotten name of Henri Rivière, master of the shadow theatre, where the *Tentation de saint Antoine* was performed, as a shadow play, over a hundred times, in 1887 and 1888. Rivière was not only the creator of the book I have been describing; he was also the technical and artistic mastermind behind the shadow theatre that put on the “féerie”.

Technically, that shadow theatre was an astonishing achievement. The audience sitting in the cabaret theatre, on the second floor of the Chat Noir building, looking at the small canvas screen set into the wall, saw nothing of the stupendous mechanism behind that screen. It was housed in an enormous wooden box, ten metres high, sticking out of the back of the building. At the back of the enormous box, three metres from the screen, was a powerful light source. Between the screen and the light source was a series of about seventy slots, some vertical and some horizontal, through which slides could be moved, up and down or from side to side, by pulling on strings. The back sixty slots were used for slides made of coloured glass or paper; these made the backgrounds. At the front were slides for the characters, which were made out of cut-out zinc. A few of these zinc characters have survived. Some pictures of them may be found by googling on:

“chat noir” Rivière zinc

A character zinc near the front, just behind the cloth screen, would come out as a clear black shadow against the coloured background. A character zinc further back would come out as grey. The zincs and the background slides could all be moved independently to create a dazzlingly complex play of characters and colours. The most characteristic effect was the contrast of static colour, often likened to a stained glass window, and black for the more mobile and more clearly defined main characters. The spectacle was divided up into a number of tableaux, but within each tableau, there could be more or less movement, particularly of the zincs.

Each tableau lasted for about one minute (so the whole forty-tableau spectacle lasted for forty minutes), and was accompanied both by words, and by music. The music was usually provided, as far as one can tell, by the piano, often played by Tinchant (one of the two musicians who arranged and composed the music for the shadow play). Rivière’s book shows us what the character of that music was. But what of the words? We have no concrete trace of them. What we do know, from contemporary accounts, is that they were provided by the extraordinary voice of Rodolphe Salis, who spoke all of them, from his prominent station in front of the screen

Rodolphe Salis was the very spirit of the Chat Noir. He founded, owned, and ran the cabaret, he kept his eye on every material, artistic, social and financial detail of its operation, and he seemed to be present everywhere, running everything and imprinting his character on everything. He welcomed arrivals (and decided who would and would not be allowed into the various rooms in the establishment). But above all, he was the cabaret’s “bonimenteur”. This is not an easy word to translate. A “boniment” is usually defined as what a charlatan or a fairground performer would say to attract and dazzle his clientèle. It always has an element of wordy excess and hype and telling more or less than the truth. It also implies wit, verbal virtuosity, grandiloquence, bluff, and a certain mocking tone. Rodolphe Salis was universally recognised as a genius in this essentially improvisatory, comic, and ironic genre; and that is the style in which he provided all the words, as far as one can tell, for all the many hundreds of shadow theatre performances that formed the cultural heart of his cabaret. But of that torrent of words, we have no record at all. Rivière’s book contains not the slightest hint of their existence. The few texts in the book are, as we have seen, by Flaubert, not by Salis. This evacuation of Salis’s words is no chance omission. It is a key symptom of the intermedial relations at the root of the shadow theatre’s extraordinary success as an avant-garde theatrical art form.

The general principle behind all the Parisian avant-garde art of the time was that art should work by suggesting something absent from the material of the work, something that appeared to come from somewhere else, somewhere outside what we could physically see or hear. This avant-garde art of suggestion was universally defined as an art of idealism, in opposition to naturalism, which was seen as the dominant mode of the despicable bourgeois novel and theatre. The Chat Noir shadow theatre was received from the beginning by critics and by artists as a uniquely successful example of non-naturalist, idealist, suggestive theatrical art. In this, it was truly remarkable. In poetry and painting, idealist suggestive art had had some success by 1887, in the verse of Verlaine and Mallarmé and the paintings we now call impressionist. (It is, of course, no coincidence that many of the poets, painters, and musicians who had been instrumental in creating this aesthetic were known to frequent the Chat Noir, or to contribute to its house magazine.) But in the theatre, that aesthetic had struggled to realise itself. The reason for this struggle between the theatre and the new aesthetic was being carefully theorised by Mallarmé in 1887, precisely, in a series of theatre reviews which he subsequently collected and published (in revised form) in his volume *Divagations* under the title “Crayonné au théâtre” (“Pencilled in the theatre”) (Mallarmé 1897: 153-233). The fundamental problem is that in the theatre, all the media are physically present together. So suggestion becomes much more difficult. How can music suggest an absent poetry when there is actually poetry present? How can poetry suggest a visual scene when the visual is actually present? Rivière’s stroke of genius was to separate the media in space as well as in tonality, while keeping them simultaneously present in time. His shadow theatre separated the images from the sound, so that one came from behind the screen while the other came from in front. They were juxtaposed, but they did not occupy the same space. That aesthetic of juxtaposition is brilliantly materialised in the book by the separation between the music, on the left hand pages, and the images on the right; as if the fold in the middle represented the screen in the cabaret. Furthermore, what the music suggests is always related to the images, but is always also very deliberately exceeded by the images. What is missing from the music is that black zinc figure of the saint, and indeed the black zinc figure of the Devil. As they silently move across the screen, they seem to accuse the music of being stuck in the world of meaning, the world in which we believe we can know what things are and what they signify. But the Chat Noir sense of comic distance always tells us at the same time that the meaning of the music, so relentlessly light-hearted, is not to be taken as a full expression of the true artistic value of the work, or of the ideals that it embodies. They go beyond what music can say.

To return to the essential question of situation: in the book, then, the images on every right-hand page go beyond what the music on the left-hand page seems to say. Similarly, in the theatre, the images on the screen would have gone beyond what the music in front of the screen would have been saying; and the physical distance between the piano in front of the screen, and the shadow theatre mechanism behind it, would have figured that intermedial separation. One might add that just as the shadow play is haunted by Flaubert’s work, so the music is haunted by the composers it borrows from, from Offenbach to Haydn, Schumann and Wagner. Behind both is an idealism which is not quite expressed in the other. And what of Salis’s words? In the theatre, they, like the music, would have come from in front of the screen. They would, of course, have interpreted for the audience the drama being played out on the screen. But that interpretation would always have presented itself as ironic, never as exhaustive. Salis never saw himself as a poet, as someone whose words had a literary value; he was always a facilitator of art, a “cabaretier”, never a verbal artist himself. (He had for a time been a visual artist; he soon realised his true genius lay elsewhere.) His role as “bonimenteur” was to create, not high art in words alone, but the sense of comic distance to which I have referred. In the theatre, this comic distance could be materialised in the physical distance between himself, before the screen, and the zinc characters behind it. It would have been immediately obvious, of course, that the voice one was hearing was his, not Antoine’s or the Devil’s.

In a book, how could this be represented? We are so used to relating printed words directly to the character who is meant to have said them ... how could the book have materialised the fact that the words were in Salis’s style and voice, and not in the silent, imagined voice of the zinc characters? How could it have reproduced the distance between the place where Salis stood, and the screen? It would have been impossible. His improvised comic “boniment”, if printed, would have rooted the characters in their verbal representation, instead of maintaining their separation from it. That would have ruined the ideal suggestiveness of the work. Rivière’s solution was to exclude the words totally.

Or rather – that is how it appears to us. But in 1888, it is a safe bet that no one would have purchased this book, with its explicit reference to the Chat Noir theatre on the title page, without knowing full well what the Chat Noir style was, without knowing who Rodolphe Salis was, indeed without having either experienced his “boniments”, or having read his comic prose in the house magazine. Haunting Rivière’s book, then, we should imagine not only Flaubert’s work and the music evoked, but also those words, that “boniment”, never published but always present at every performance of the “féerie” that Rivière’s book purports to be. And to the extent that the remembered “boniment” from the performance haunts the book from which it is absent, so, too, does another aspect of the performance which the book occludes: the movement of the images. The fame and effect of the Chat Noir shadow theatre, as constructed by Rivière, was a product of the fact that its tableaux were not static. The zinc characters moved, during the scenes; so, too, did the coloured background slides – although, as with the words, we have absolutely no contemporary accounts that tell us exactly what happened. Anyone reading the book, and having seen or heard about the “féerie” in its original theatrical form, will therefore be drawn not to see the pictures, music, and words in the book as forming a coherent, closed, and mutually referential intermedial unit, but as the stimulus to imagining all the ghostly presences that they suggest, and which escape them. The words of Salis and of Flaubert, the musical world from which Tinchant and Fragerolle borrow, and the moving images of the shadow theatre are all there to be imagined in their absence, as is the inexpressible idealism of the saint at the heart of the work.

The Chat Noir shadow theatre was, I think, the only theatrical spectacle of those years which was received both as magnificently idealist (and hence anti-naturalist), and magnificently popularly successful. Zola, the prince of Naturalism (who, of course, came to the Chat Noir), had been trying to revolutionise the theatre in the direction of naturalism; his aesthetic enemies rejoiced in the success of the shadow theatre in accomplishing a revolution heading in precisely the opposite direction.

Pends-toi, Zola! cette révolution [...] s’est réalisée [...] loin des vulgarités de ton naturalisme, dans le domaine de la fantaisie et du rêve, par le théâtre [...] que Rivière vient d’asseoir dans sa forme définitive avec cette *Tentation de saint Antoine* [...]; conception d’artiste et de poète, théâtre idéal [...] théâtre suggestif aussi, où une ligne, un trait, ouvrent à l’imagination du spectateur les horizons insaisissables du rêve.

Zola, you may as well go and hang yourself! This revolution [...] has been accomplished [...] far from the vulgarities of your naturalism, in the realm of fantasy and dream, by the theatre [...] that Rivière has established in its definitive form with this *Temptation of Saint Anthony* [...] it is the conception of an artist and a poet, an ideal theatre [...] as well as a theatre of suggestion, where a single line can open up to the imagination the ungraspable horizons of dream.

This review by Edouard Norès, entitled “*La tentation de Saint Antoine* de Rivière au Chat Noir” and published in the magazine *Les Premières illustrées* in 1887 (cf. Lucet 2006: 146), is a perfect example of the intermedial style of the time. To begin with, note how it uses the word “poète”: not to indicate what Rivière did with words – Rivière did nothing with words, he left those to Flaubert and Salis – but to indicate a property of a non-verbal medium, in this case a visual medium, which was opposed to naturalistic representation. A poet in this sense is exactly and precisely *not* someone who writes poetry. On the contrary, a poet is someone who uses non-verbal media to produce that effect of poetry which goes beyond words. That “going beyond the medium” is also figured here, as it always is, through the emphasis on suggestion, on an opening out onto what cannot be grasped – the ungraspable horizons of dream. And to keep those horizons ungraspable, Norès strategically omits all reference to what really enables this theatre of suggestion to work: its music and the “boniment” of Rodolphe Salis, which carry the work through the forty minutes of its representation and create at once the link to the familiar time of the spectator, and the ironic distance between voice and image that propels us towards “les horizons insaisissables du rêve”. Norès does not mention the music, Salis’s words, or the movement of the slides in the shadow theatre. Nor, as I have said, do any of the other descriptions of the spectacle that have come down to us; not even Rivière’s own descriptions, in his wonderfully

evocative posthumously published autobiography (cf. Rivière 2004: 46-61). This is no coincidence. What it signifies is that Rivière's contemporaries understood full well the necessity of leaving entire the space of suggestiveness around the work. Just as Rivière does in his book, so all the people who saw and appreciated his achievement knew that they had to leave the "boniment" of Salis, the movement of the images, and the true nature of the music unspoken in print. They were an indispensable part of the spectacle's ideal force and success, but only thanks to the distances that the shadow theatre was able to maintain between them. In the pages of a book or of a journal, those distances must be replaced by silences, and much of what was physically present in the theatre has to become ghostly.

As well as its house journal, the Chat Noir published a book which became extremely popular: *Les Gaîtés du Chat Noir*. It was largely a collection of the hilarious tales that were told in the cabaret and published in the journal. The book contained none of the words associated with the shadow plays. But in the preface to the second edition, in 1894, Jules Lemaitre, one of the leading spirits of the cabaret, paid an appropriate homage to Rivière, to his theatre, and to the idealism of which it was the Chat Noir's purest incarnation: an idealism at the heart of the cabaret, but which its printed words and static images could not capture. After describing the comic force of the cabaret, Lemaitre wrote:

Et, en même temps, le Chat-Noir contribuait au "réveil de l'idéalisme". Il était mystique, avec le génial paysagiste et découpeur d'ombres Henri Rivière. L'orbe lumineux de son guignol fut un œil-de-bœuf ouvert sur l'invisible.

(Lemaitre 1894: VII)

And, at the same time, the Chat Noir was contributing to the "awakening of idealism". It was mystical, with Henri Rivière, creator of shadow shapes and landscape painter of genius. The luminous orbit of his puppet theatre was an ox-eye window opening onto the invisible.

It was not by chance that this idealist shadow theatre flourished in the atmosphere created by the Chat Noir, and nowhere else. When Rodolphe Salis died in 1897, the shadow theatre for which he was the "bonimenteur" died too. It could not work without him, and without the theatrical space that he created and animated. Henri Rivière himself lived until 1951, and had a successful career as an artist. But he never tried anything like the shadow theatre again. He knew that it was born of a unique moment, when the music and the words on one side of the screen knew how to entertain their audience while always keeping their respectful distance from the silent images behind them, stiffly moving on that extraordinary series of grooves receding into the distance. Nowhere else, perhaps, have popular music and entertaining banter been so perfectly married in theatrical time with the purest and most silent form of high art; and what enabled this unique moment in artistic time, to which Rivière's lovely book bears witness, was that little cloth screen between the source of the sound, in front of the screen, and the source of the images, behind it.

The relationship between words, music, and the moving image in Rivière's *Tentation de saint Antoine* is, then, to be understood in terms of distances, hauntings, absences, ungraspable horizons, and windows onto the invisible, at least as much as in terms of synergies, mutual support, and collaboration. In this, though its genre is unique (as I have said, I know of no other book that combines visual art and music in this way), it represents perfectly intermedial relations as they have defined a certain high art tradition since the days of the Romantic revolution, two centuries ago. The arts, in their different media, have constructed themselves in relation to each other not by working together in peaceful harmony, but by keeping each other at a certain kind of distance; and it is the quality of that distance that matters. To appreciate the character and value of this distance, my strategy has been to examine how works of art which involve several media actually keep those media apart, in such a way that one cannot properly theorise the relationship between them except as a distance, a gap, a space in which something happens which escapes all media and indeed all theory, including mine. That space is where art lives. What is, to me, uniquely expressive about the Chat Noir shadow theatre is that there, this space can actually be physically localised. It is that thin piece of

blank cloth in the wall. Behind it are moving images. In front of it are music and words. The spectators in the theatre were actually focusing their eyes on the space between them, the space where they do not quite meet, the screen that is itself nothing but a veil; a veil that we ourselves will never see, but can imagine, as an ungraspable horizon of our dreams.

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